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LOSS OF THE KARLUK AND ESCAPE OF THE EXPEDITION TO WRANGELL ISLAND

The New York Times, on June 1, printed a long despatch from Captain Robert A. Bartlett, Commander of the *Karluk*, dated St. Michael, Alaska, May 31, giving the remarkable particulars of the *Karluk's* drift to the west for 110 days when she was crushed in the ice on January 11, 1914. A large quantity of supplies of all kinds had been placed on the ice, and the entire party reached Wrangell Island over the ice, with food resources for eighty-six days, on Feb. 13. The leadings facts are here condensed from *The Times's* account, with some explanatory comment.

Stefansson left the *Karluk* to hunt on shore on September 20, last year. It was thought that the vessel was frozen in for the winter. She was then about 15 miles north of the mouth of the Colville River. On September 21, a fierce gale from the east came up and, two days later, the ice which held the *Karluk* began to drift westward; and on September 25, Bartlett from the mast-head caught a glimpse of Cape Halkett.¹ The vessel was drifting in an ice floe about two miles square. On September 26, the wind veered to the north-west. All leads closed between the ship and shore and the *Karluk* was for three days becalmed within six miles of Tangent Point.²

Preparations were begun to leave the ship if necessary. But on September 29, the wind changed to the northeast and the westerly drift was resumed among many grounded icebergs. On October 6, the vessel was twenty-five miles off-shore and drifting rapidly north beyond the 20 fathom line. The next day the *Karluk* was unmistakably north of the continental shelf, probably near the 72nd parallel. On October 11, bottom was found in mud and sand at 6,000 feet, or in oceanic depths.³ On October 12, starfish and other species of sea life, hitherto unknown in the Arctic, were brought up from depths of about 7,000 feet. Captain Bartlett continues:

"We continued drifting northwest until October 22 when the nearest point should have been Keenan Land about 20 miles south of our position." For several days men with glasses sought land from the crow's nest without finding it.⁴

¹ Cape Halkett is about sixty statute miles northwest of the mouth of the Colville.

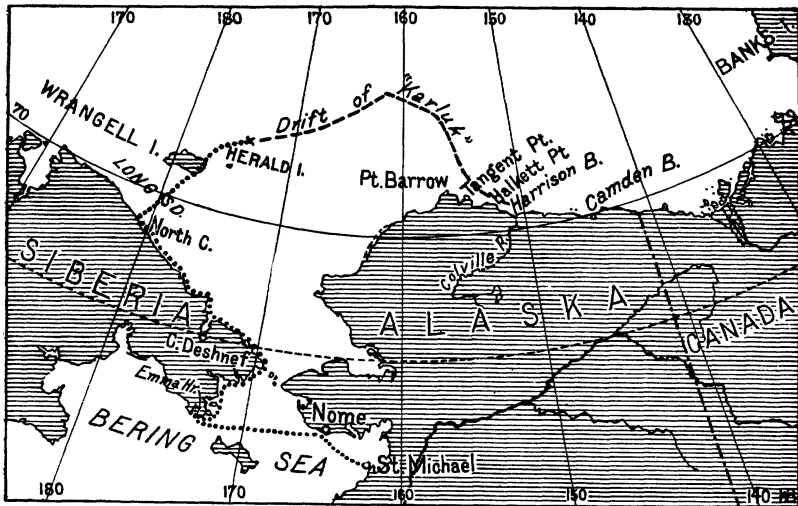
² Approximately thirty miles southeast of Point Barrow. The closing of the leads, with more or less shattered ice, would make passage to land very difficult.

³ In the spring of 1907 the Mikkelsen-Leffingwell Expedition sounded to depths of 620 feet without touching bottom, between 71° and 72° N. and 148° and 150° E. The party was plainly north of the continental shelf but the shortness of the sounding line made it impossible to obtain precise depths (*Bull.*, Vol. 39, 1907, pp. 607-620). These soundings and those of Bartlett, some 4° further west, show that the continental shelf is narrow along this part of Alaska's coast with the strong probability that this condition prevails along the entire coast.

⁴ This statement cannot be reconciled with what is conjectured as to the position of Keenan Land, if it really exists. The discrepancy may be due to imperfect telegraphic transmission. Bartlett reports, thus far, an almost invariable drift to the west. He says that, on October 7, his position was 154° 5' W. But on October 22 "after continued drifting northwest, Keenan Land should have been twenty miles south of our position." Keenan Land is placed on the charts hypothetically in about 146-147° W. Long. The late Marcus Baker said that the position

On November 1, Bartlett reports shallow water again at 100 fathoms. On November 5 he placed on the ice 250 sacks of coal, 100 cases of biscuit and other articles that would be needed after leaving the ship. The party shot their first bear on November 10. Next day the sun disappeared, the water was calm but the prevailing easterly winds kept the *Karluk* steadily moving westward. No current was observed and the ice movements seemed to be influenced only by winds. In his opinion, the prevailing winter winds in that region are from northeast to east. He continues:

"The theory of drifting across the Pole is questionable. Our drift carried the ship to the point where the *Jeannette* began her drift. The *Jeannette*, if not lost, probably would have taken the course of the *Fram*. It is possible that there is adjoining land in an unexplored region."⁵



Drift of the *Karluk* and Captain Bartlett's route.

Bartlett found much animal life in lat. 73°, long. 162° E. approximately. This was the most northern point reached. The date was November 15. Soundings here showed 288 feet. Later in the month the Eskimos caught five white foxes and the dredge brought up eleven species of animal life. On November 24, twilight was still strong enough to permit reading the figures on the transit without the aid of a lantern. The drift continued south and southwest until December 15, when more easterly winds took the ship west-

of Captain Keenan's ship, when he says he saw land, was between Harrison and Camden Bays. Captain Keenan reported that he saw this land in the seventies when in command of the whaling bark *Stamboul*. Land, he said, was distinctly seen by him to the north, and all the men of the crew saw it; but as he was not on a voyage of discovery and no whales were in sight he was obliged to go south in search of them (*Bull.*, Vol. 39, 1907, p. 227).

⁵ It may be said, however, that one of the buoys set adrift by Bryant and Melville, to the north of northwest Alaska, was picked up on the north coast of Iceland. Its most probable route was conjectured to be northward across the polar area till it got into the East Greenland south-flowing current which carried it to Iceland.

ward. On New Year's Eve, 1913, the *Karluk* was sixty miles north by east of Herald Island.

Great ice pressure was observed on January 2. At 3 A. M., on January 10, the men were awakened by a sharp report like that of a gun, and the ship was quivering. The ice had opened from the stem of the vessel in a westerly direction for about 300 feet where the crack closed. At 7.30 P. M. the wind increased to a gale with blinding snow, a corner of the ice sheet struck the ship abreast of the engine room, breaking some of her timber planks, and water began to pour into the engine room. Pemmican, milk, clothing, ammunition, arms, oil, etc., sewn in canvas, were immediately placed on the ice. In spite of the darkness, the men did as much in an hour as they would ordinarily in six hours. Ten thousand pounds of supplies were hauled on sledges to the solid ice pan, one hundred yards away, where a house made of boxes and covered with sails and other articles had been previously placed. An Eskimo woman with her baby was sent to the house to make a fire in the stove and prepare for the arrival of the men. Practically everything could have been saved; but as pemmican, biscuit, tea and milk were sufficient for rations the delicacies were left on the ship.

At 10.45 P. M. there were eleven feet of water in the engine room. By midnight, all supplies had been placed on solid ice. At that time Bartlett sent the men to the shelter house but remained himself on the ship until she sank, on Jan. 11, at 4.30 P. M. in 38 fathoms of water. A snow house was also built beside the boxhouse. All mattresses had been saved, there was a stove in each house, plenty of coal and good food was regularly provided. This place was called Camp Shipwreck. It was decided, as soon as the sun returned, to begin carrying the supplies to land. About 60 miles away, south by west, there appeared to be land which the men thought was Wrangell Island. Mate Anderson, second mate Barker and two sailors were sent ahead on Jan. 20 with three months' supplies to look for game and make a trail to facilitate the removal of the supplies towards shore. Everybody was kept busy making skin clothes. Mamen (the assistant geographer), who, with Eskimos, 20 dogs and three sledges, was sent on to support mates Anderson and Barker, returned in three days and said they had accompanied the mates to within three miles of land. On January 31, it proved to be Herald Island and could not be reached on account of open water. Wrangell Island, thirty-eight miles from Herald Island, was not sighted.

Early in February, Mamen, Dr. A. Forbes Mackay, James Murray, the oceanographer, and Henri Beauchat, the anthropologist, set out for land, hauling sledges and following the trail of the supporting party. Supplies were also advanced along the trail. The whole party reached Wrangell Island⁶ on

⁶For over a century before Wrangell Island was discovered it was reported to exist on the strength of Chukchee reports. Wrangell, the famous explorer of north Siberian waters, vainly looked for it in 1824. Nordenskiöld did not see it when he made the northeast passage. It was at last discovered by an American whaler, Thomas Long, who sailed along its south coast, August 14-16, 1867, discovering its southeastern cape and its western extremity. Other whalers also saw it. The great geographer Petermann, who believed that Greenland was a continent crossing the Pole and probably approaching Siberia, advanced the idea that Wrangell Island was the extremity of Greenland towards Asia. The theory of a continent, however, was exploded by Commander De Long, on the Jeanette Expedition, when he entered the pack ice near Herald Island expecting to reach and winter at Wrangell Island. His vessel, however, never escaped the pack but drifted almost steadily westward, passing to the north and in sight of Wrangell Island which thus shrank to the dimensions of a small island.

Feb. 13, landing on an ice spit. Bartlett's party were the first to set foot on this land. Plenty of driftwood was found for fuel. The party then had eighty-six days provisions for every person and three men were sent back to Camp Shipwreck for additional supplies.

Bartlett left Wrangell Island on Feb. 18 for the Siberian shore, one hundred miles away, with Perry and Eskimos, a sledge and seven dogs. His purpose was to secure means of sending relief to his party. He was much delayed in crossing Long Sound (named after Thomas Long) by heavy gales and moving ice. Three of his dogs were lost on the way. He was kindly treated by the natives along the Siberian coast to Cape Deshnef, where he met Baron Kleist, who invited the men to his house at Emma Harbor, Bering Sea, where the chances were best that they would meet a whaler. Emma Harbor was reached in the middle of May, when Captain Petersen of the whaler *Herman* relinquished his whaling and trading enterprise and started with Bartlett and his men for the American coast. Ice prevented them from landing at Nome and they therefore went on to St. Michael. Bartlett had been only three months on his long journey to the Bering Sea coast.

The Canadian Government is taking prompt measures to send relief to the men whom Bartlett left on Wrangell Island. On June 9, Captain Cochran, of the U. S. revenue cutter *Bear*, at St. Michael, Alaska, was instructed by the Assistant Secretary of the Department of the Treasury to endeavor to rescue the *Karluk's* party.

The *Karluk's* drift measured, in a straight line from her starting point off the mouth of Colville River to some sixty miles north by east of Herald Island where she sank, about 590 statute miles. Only to the east of Point Barrow did her course diverge a little to the south of this line; but there were a number of divergencies to the north of it, the greatest of which was about 70 miles north of the line about midway of the drift. The divergencies from a straight course probably increased the length of her journey by at least 200 miles, making the total drift about 800 miles, or an average daily drift of over 7 miles.

The drift of the *Karluk*, the ice journey to Wrangell Island dragging tons of supplies, and Bartlett's long tramp from that island through northeastern Siberia will have a conspicuous place in the annals of Arctic exploration.